New Year's Old Time Romance Lost in Modern Noise

OUR grandfathers did not give up $50 each for the privilege of spending New Year's eve in crowded restaurants. Neither did they, at the stroke of twelve, put on caps of colored paper, ring cow bells, and throw confetti at strangers. Yet we, who ridicule their traditions and superstitions, can find, it seems, no more satisfactory way in which to speed the old year and welcome the new.

Perhaps we might profitably follow their example. Certainly their way of waiting for the new year at home, or at the home of their friends, with games and songs and domestic cheer, was less expensive than our way. Also it is a matter for regret that the pleasant customs of paying New Year's calls and of giving New Year's presents has disappeared. All the ritual of the day is gone; even the newsboy brings only a prosaic calendar nowadays, instead of the elaborate poetic address which in years gone by set forth his claims on the world's generosity. And New Year's resolutions exist chiefly in the imagination of humorous writers.

Now, it is true that the apparently harmless customs of paying calls and giving presents on New Year's day were not regarded with favor by all critics of morals and manners. Early in the eighteenth century Henry Bourne, M. A., "curate of the parochial chapel of All Saints', in Newcastle upon Tyne," wrote "Antiquitates vulgares, or the antiquities of the common people, giving an account of their opinions and ceremonies, with proper reflections upon each of them; shewing which may be retained and which ought to be laid aside." And he felt that he must be very careful indeed with his discussion of New Year's calls and gifts. He approved of them, in moderation; but he wanted to be on the safe side.

"As the vulgar are always very careful to end the old year well," he wrote, (pointing his satire by means of italics,) "so they are also careful of beginning well the new one. As they end the former with a hearty compotation, so they begin the latter with the sending of presents, which are termed New Year's gifts to their friends and acquaintances; the original of both which customs is superstitious and sinful; and was observed that the succeeding year might be prosperous and successful."

He calls many writers to witness the antiquity of these customs, quoting from Bishop Stillingfleet, Claus Wormius, Scheffer, "Snorro Sturleson," and "the poet Naogeorgus." Then he writes: "And no doubt, those Christians were highly worthy of censure, who imagined, as the heathens did, that the sending of a present then was in any way lucky, and an omen of the success of the following year. For this was the very thing that made several holy men, and some general councils, take notice of, and forbid any such custom; because the observance of it, out of any such design and view, was superstitious and sinful, we are told, in a place of St. Austin, the observation of the calends of January is forbid, the songs which were wont to be sung on that day, the feastings, and the presents which were then sent as a token and omen of a good year. But to send a present at that time, out of esteem, or gratitude, or charity, is no where forbid.

"On the contrary, it is praiseworthy. For the ancient fathers did vehemently inveigh against the observations of the calends of January; yet it was not because of those presents and tokens of mutual affection and love that passed; but because the day itself was dedicated to idols, and because of some prophane rites and ceremonies they observed in solemnizing it.

"If then I send a New Year's gift to my friend, it shall be a token of my friendship; if to my benefactor, a token of my gratitude; if to the poor (which at this time must never be forgot) it shall be to make their hearts sing for joy, and give praise and adoration to the giver of all good gifts."

At any rate, we still say "Happy New Year!" whether or not the words have any special significance to us. In the time of the learned Bourne there were those who regarded this phrase with deep suspicion. He writes: "Another old custom at this time is the wishing of a good New Year, either when a New Year's gift is presented, or when friends meet. Now, the original of this custom is heathenish, as appears by the feasting and presents before mentioned, which were a wish for a good year, and it was customary among the heathens on the calends of January, to go about and sing a New Year's song. Hospinian, therefore, tells that when night comes on, not only the young, but also the old of both sexes, run about here and there, and sing a song at the doors of the wealthier people, in which they wish them a happy New Year. This he speaks indeed of the Christians, but he calls it an exact copy of the heathen's custom.

"But, however, I cannot see the harm of retaining this ancient ceremony, so it be not used superstitiously, nor attended with obscenity and lewdness. For then there will be no more harm than wishing a good each others welfare and prosperity; no more harm, than wishing a good day, or good night; than in bidding one godspeed."

In Philadelphia there has been preserved up to recent years the custom of New Year's "mumming." Boys and girls—men and women also, to some extent—dressed in fantastic clothes and with their faces painted or masked, could be seen in the streets, up to recently, begging and playing practical jokes. They did similar things in eighteenth century London, by no means to the approval of the curate of the parochial chapel of All Saints in Newcastle-on-Tyne. He writes: "There is another custom observed at this time, which is called among us mumming; which is a changing of clothes between men and women; who when dressed in each others' habits go from one neighbor's house to another, and make merry with them in disguise, by dancing and singing, and such like merriments. * * * It were to be wished this custom which is still so common among us at this season of the year were laid aside; as it is directly opposite to the word of God."

It is possible that "mumming" is related in some way to the performance which marked "Hogmanay" in England and Scotland. "Hogmanay" was the last day of the year. Some scholars think the word comes from the Greek "agia mene," ("holy month"); others from the Saxon "halig monath," which has the same meaning; still others from the French phrase "Au gui menez" ("to the mistletoe go!") which mummers anciently cried in France at Christmas, or from "Au gueux menez." ("Bring to the beggars!"). Whatever the origin of the word may be, Hogmanay was the time for much amateur begging.

The children went from house to house, singing such songs as:

"Hogmanay, trollolay,
Give us of your white bread,
But none of your grey,
Hogmena, Hogmena,
Give us cake and cheese, and let us go away."

As they sang they collected what they called their "farls"—oaten cake and cheese. From this developed the "letting in" of the new year. Parties of men and boys went through the town. They stopped at the front door of every house and sang until they were admitted. Then they received a small gift of money, went through the house and left by the back door. That a man should be the first visitor of the year was a general belief in the British isles for centuries, nor is it yet extinct.

In Scotland the ceremony of "first-footing" has almost entirely died out, but in some of the remoter parts of that country it is pleasantly remembered. At the approach of 12 on New Year's eve a "hot pint" was prepared. This was a kettle of warm spiced or sweetened ale, with a liberal infusion of spirits. When the clock struck, every member of the family drank to the new year.

Then the elders of the family went out into the street, carrying the kettle of spiced ale and a supply of buns, cakes, bread, and cheese. When they met a party of friends similarly engaged, they stopped to exchange greetings and sips of ale. They went to the houses of their neighbors, sent the kettle from friend to friend, and spent the hours before dawn in sociability and good cheer. If they were the first to enter a house after twelve o'clock they were the "first-foot" and received especial favor.

In England, the first-footing parties were made up generally of the poor boys of the village, who carried a "wassail-bowl" decorated with ribbons, and received in return for their proffered drinks and good wishes, cakes and cups of ale. But in Scotland as recently as 100 years ago first-footing was a democratic social institution, in which few were too proud to share. The principal streets of Edinburgh, it is said, were more crowded between twelve and one on New Year's day morning than at noon on business days.

A simple ceremony, not yet obsolete, consisted in unbarring the front door as the clock struck twelve, to let the old year out and the new year in. In the Island of Guernsey the children paraded the streets carrying the effigy of a man, emblematic of the dying year. This they buried at midnight on the seashore, with elaborate ritual. At Burghhead in Morayshire, they kept New Year's eve by "Burning the clavie." They made huge piles of herring barrels, and set fire to them with peat. The burning embers they carried home to their houses as a protection against whatever evils the year might bring.

On New Year's day the Scotch of bygone generations believed no fire should go out of the house. If it were given, misfortune might be presented by throwing burning peat into a tub of water.

There is something suggestive of the Russian Easter in one "first-footing" custom once popular in Scotland and England. The first visitor to a house on New Year's morning had the privilege of kissing the person that opened the door. Perhaps there is a reminiscence of ancient fire worship in the Shropshire custom of stirring the fire on New Year's morning before uttering a word.

Although there are few houses where New Year's day is observed with its oldtime hospitality, the day is not wholly divorced from the thought of good things to eat. The ridiculous New Year's eve dinners in the Broadway restaurants have no special significance, but there are certain dishes inseparably associated with the day.

One of these is roast goose, which is perhaps more liked in England than America. But even more characteristic are those admirable little cakes which come from Germany, and which are imported in tin boxes. German cooks have made them for centuries, have lavished their time and energy on new designs and new flavors, and the result is a cake so excellent that it must always be the special delight of the New Year feast. This point of ritual, surely, must be left us.

So excellent is the German New Year's cake that it cannot be used for a charm, like the New Year's eve cake of Ireland. For this was thrown against the wall and broken into pieces. The first fragment to touch the ground was eagerly sought, for he who ate it was sure of a year's happiness. There was much pleasure in the baking of the cake. It was placed on a gridiron before the open fire, and incantations were sung to secure the success of the charm.

THE CALL OF THE NEW YEAR

A Christian man sat in the Master's presence thinking of the coming of the new year. It was a good but solemn thing to do. The man's thoughts in that presence ran thus: "Seeing him I am sure that every year is 'the year of our Lord.' It ought to be 'begun, continued and ended in him.' He will be with me all the days. My days must be in his hands." The Christian man continued his meditation—always in his presence, "What sort of man ought I to be, this year and all years?" The answer came out of an old word which had new meaning, in his presence: "Complete in him." Again he asked: "What kind of work ought I to do this year and all years?" The centuries fade away and he seems to hear again: "Whatsoever he saith unto you do it." He asked again: "Where shall I go to be his man and do his work?" Once more old words leap into new times: "To your household, to your neighbor, and to all the world." "How can I do all this?" "The entrance of his word giveth light," therefore give yourself to Bible study; "not by might nor by power but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts," therefore give yourself to prayer; "I can do all things through Christ," therefore give yourself to work; "in all things he shall have the preeminence," therefore give yourself to him. And the man arose from the meditation to make the new year and all years, years of the Lord. And the Master arose and went with the man.—Bishop McDowell.

THE NEW YEAR.

Julia Ward Howe was no believer in New Year's resolutions. "We should make and keep good resolutions all the year round," the celebrated author once said in Boston. "I am no great believer in New Year's vows, for, although they are splendid things, they really don't amount to much more than Oliver Wendell Holmes' tobacco resolution.

"Mr. Holmes, with affected gravity, said to a friend on the first day of the year: 'I really must not smoke so persistently; I must turn over a new leaf—a tobacco leaf—and have a cigar only after each'—here he paused as if to say 'meal,' but he continued—'after each cigar.'"

A CASUAL OBSERVATION.

"We are living in an age of exceptional culture," said the woman with angular features.

"Mebbe we are," said Farmer Corntossel. "But I can't help noticin' that people walk right up to the news stand to buy some pretty fluffy stuff, while it takes a mighty good book agent to work off a set of Shakespeare."

AFRO-AMERICAN CULLINGS

We are permitted to live in a marvelous age. So many wonderful things are happening each day that we scarcely have time to read about them and little opportunity to ponder their significance. We, in the Southland, read the morning paper's reports of the progress of the European war—Awful! we exclaim, and then hurry to eagerly search for the latest developments in the cotton situation. We read, we have faith and so we are encouraged to hope for brighter days in spite of the fact that to the average of us there is little said, that we understand, to illumine the situation. One of the causes contributing to our present misfortune is a hopeless struggle to grasp the meaning of giant problems with our pygmy minds, while all around us lie the simple, essential, elemental conditions that make up life, which are easily understood and practical, and which, if given a little serious thinking, will transform this "vale of tears" into a land of joyous living.

There are some people in Texas, though, who do appreciate small beginnings and small things, and who are really making things come to pass. We should be thankful that there are still a few farmers who are not cotton crazy. A few farmers who think of hogs, chickens and eggs to raise a few, who like to eat vegetables enough to raise a garden, who raise enough corn to have some meal ground for the old-fashioned antebellum golden egg-bread, who use the milk and butter from their own dairy cows, and whose wives are just old-fashioned enough to make lye-hominy, can surplus garden stuff and fruits and make quilts to keep them warm in the winter. This class of farmers live at home and whether cotton sells or not they will continue to live, to eat and to enjoy some of the blessings of life.

The above is suggested by a meeting I attended in Waco, and about which I want to tell the readers of the Houston Post. It was a meeting of Negro farmers, about five hundred of them, representing some ten thousand others who were at home in the North, South, East and West Texas. The 500 had been sent to Waco to work in the nineteenth annual convention of the Farmers' Improvement society of Texas. Here are some of the things they did. They sang songs of praise and prayed God for his blessing on their humble efforts with a fervor surpassing anything I had ever seen or heard in a church. They then discussed, made demonstrations and produced samples of stuff they raised or made illustrating selected subjects pertaining to the farmers' yearly work. They made intelligent written reports from their various county organizations on the work accomplished during the past year and made plans for another year's work. There was wit and humor and song and laughter interspersed with huge chunks of hard common sense. They were sober-minded men and women bent upon finding the way to the better life for themselves and their children. There was order—there was organization.—Wade C. Rollins, in the Houston Post.

If these United States of America should become involved in war, what part do you think the Negro of the South would play?

If he were asked to take up arms to help protect the peace and prosperity of the southland—and refuse?

If he should stand and tell the people of the South. "No, sah; I'se not goin' ter no war; I'se got der rheumatism?"

If the Negro would say, "We's don' tried to help you once, and you turned us off after we's don' won a battle at San Juan hill."

If the loafing Negro and the other sons of rest would refuse to give their services as cooks and other required labor?

"My dear readers, the above is an "if." If these United States of America should become involved in the present war, we, the colored people of the South, stand ready to give our services, property and lives for the peace and prosperity of the southland. Nor would we sneak from the battlefield and hang around the cook pot. We are ready to fall in line and advance in pursuit of the enemy. It is true, when the North and South were fighting, our fathers and mothers were left behind to care for the families and farms. And when "master" came back from the battlefield he found everything better than he left it; all the corn had been planted and all the land had been broken up.

We want the good white people of the southland to ever remember that the blood of the old reliable, trustworthy "mammy" and "uncle" is still in the South. We realize that those who refuse to give us justice at times are the ones who have forgotten the good deeds of the old Negro "mammy" and "uncle." The same blood that traced the old "mammy" and "uncle" veins traces their sons' and daughters' veins.—C. J. Taylor, in the Houston Post.

In the midst of the war situation, it is sincerely to be hoped that the general public will not forget the needs of such institutions as the Tuskegee Normal and Industrial institute, located in Alabama, in the heart of the South.

Whatever conditions may arise, it is of the highest importance to continue without interruption to give that training which will insure the prosperity of the South and peaceful relationships between white people and black people.

After deducting all sums likely to be received from stated sources, including a sum guaranteed by trustees and friends of the school, there remain to be raised this year by the principal of Tuskegee institute in the form of $50 scolarship, or otherwise, for current expenses, about $125,000.

The amount referred to not only includes the direct expenses of the school for the work on the grounds, but the extension work, which influences and reaches a large part of the far South. Even the smallest amount will be gratefully received and promptly acknowledged.

The work of the institute is now so thoroughly established, and its great value to the Negro people and to the nation so fully demonstrated, that the school should not be allowed to suffer in its need for current expenses.

BOOKER T. WASHINGTON,
Principal, Tuskegee Institute, Alabama.

Prospecting for oil near Calgary has resulted in the discovery of a fine quality of oil at a depth of 2,700 feet in what is called the Dingman well. The oil is of such high grade that it can be used successfully in automobiles after having passed through the filter.

An antiquarian society has recently obtained one of the most interesting collections in the country. It consists of the commercial tokens and mock coins issued by tradesmen during the Civil war when small change with the government stamp became a rarity. There are in the collection about one thousand varieties of tokens.

A successful peach grower, S. J. T. Bush, in a recent talk at Rochester, N. Y., said that 200,000 bushels of peaches rotted on the trees in one New York county alone in 1912 for lack of cars to transport them to market.

The newest battleship building for the United States will be 1,400 tons larger than Japan's largest, 3,400 tons larger than Germany's, 3,900 tons larger than Great Britain's, and 6,500 tons larger than anything France plans.

It has been discovered that the leaf of the pineapple can be wought into a serviceable cloth.

Not many years ago Russia was a strong rival of the United States in the production of petroleum. Now the Russian empire yields only about 68 per cent as much oil as California alone, and not much more than Oklahoma.

Germany has 173 stock companies in textiles, capitalized for an aggregate of $81,512,000.

The average earning of a film of moderate length is said to be nearly $15,000.

The unassailable supremacy of the "Smiths" in London can be estimated from the telephone directory. The honorable family of Jones, for example, occupies not quite four pages. The Robinsons, who have a plate with the greatest, do not require two pages. But the Smiths begin on page 732 and end on page 770.

The United States forest service has undertaken the reforestation of a large section in northern Idaho destroyed by forest fires in 1910 to determine whether the destruction of trees decreases the flow of streams.

Irrigation projects now under way or contemplated by the Union of South Africa call for an expenditure of more than $5,000,000.

A new Tennessee law makes provision for fire escapes on workshops and factories two stories and more in height.

The bulk of the aluminum ore of the United States is produced in Arkansas.

There are said to be nearly or quite one thousand varieties of rice in the Philippine islands. It is probable that some of these will prove nearly duplicates, but the actual number of varieties is very great.

In Berlin there has been constructed a skating rink with all the properties of ice, but made of salt, the invention of a German scientist.

It is asserted that more children are employed in dangerous occupations now than 30 years ago.

INTERNATIONAL SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON

(By E. O. SELLERS, Acting Director of Sunday School Course.)

LESSON FOR DECEMBER 27

JESUS, THE WORLD'S SAVIOR AND KING.

(Review.)

READING LESSON—II Cor. 5:14-21.
GOLDEN TEXT—Far be it from me to glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.—Gal. 6:14 R. V.

With the exception of the temperance lesson, all the lessons of the quarter have to do with the death and resurrection of our Lord. In the first quarter we considered Jesus as the great Teacher; in the second, he is presented chiefly as the seeking Savior; in the third, we observed him as he acted in judgment upon Israel and sin; in this last, he is seen in his supreme office as Savior and king. The king of love, he is also the world's Savior. Deny him his kingship, refuse to become a subject of that kingdom of which he is the head and we bring upon ourselves the condemnation of a righteous judgment. This past quarter particularly reveals him in that final ministry which resulted in the initiation of the new enterprise of proclaiming his gospel, to the end that his kingdom shall be established. We shall consider the lessons under four headings:

Story of Love.

I. Those of Preparation for His Passion. These embrace the first three lessons. (1) In the first, we have the beautiful story of the love which anointed him for burial, which he accepted and immortalized. This was not because of the greatness of the act, but because of the appreciation of himself and of his words. (2) Here we observe him presiding over and instituting that lasting memorial, the symbolic feast, wherein the old passes away and the new dispensation is ushered in. (3) In the third lesson we view with awe the agony of the garden wherein he dedicated himself to the coming suffering, "Not as I will, but as thou will"—absolute surrender and delight in the Father's will.

II. Those That Preceded His Passion. These next five lessons lead us through those dark shadows, yea, through a darkness which is yet unfathomable and which ended in the total darkness of Calvary. (4) In this lesson Judas is presented, the incarnation of evil, and the agent of Satan, who betrayed his Lord and "Friend" by a kiss. Here we see the utter ruin of a soul which chose private ambition instead of fellowship with Jesus. (5) This is a presentation of the greatest and most appalling travesty of justice the world has ever seen. Humanity never descended to any lower depths, yet he is serene, calm, dignified and strong. (6) The Temperance Lesson. (7) This lesson considers the heart-breaking rashness of Peter. (8) This is the story of the ignoble failure of a weak, vacillating, time-server. Pilate's conscience was keenly alive, yet at last, that he might save himself and retain his position of power, he gave Jesus over to the hatred and malice of his enemies by ordering him to be crucified.

Story of the Cross.

III. His Passion. (9) This brings us to the story of the cross itself, as considered in this sequence of lessons. Before that awe-inspiring, wonder-creating event we stand with bared head. Here sin was unmasked and did its utmost. Her also we behold grace unveiled and active.

IV. The Post-Passion Lessons. We are now in a new atmosphere and light, a new glory is to be seen. (10) In this lesson we behold the empty tomb, for "He could not be holden of death." We share with them the glorious, the joyful consciousness that he whom we have just seen die in ignominy and shame and suffering is now alive and "ever liveth" to be our advocate and ever-present friend. This is a glorious fact, that of the literal, bodily resurrection of Christ from among the dead. Hallelujah! (11) In lesson eleven this same thought is again emphasized and with the suggestion of its accompanying obligation, in that "we are witnesses of these things." These first disciples received their great commission and were told how in infinite grace the Savior and king first of all calls his followers into fellowship with himself before they are sent out to carry on those enterprises which are the fruit of his death and resurrection. (12) In this is found the blessed record of those last words of him who "shewed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things concerning the kingdom" (Acts 1:3). Here is not alone the unquestioned certainty of the resurrection of Christ from the dead, but the record of his present place "in the heavenlies," whither he ascended to be with the Father, and also the glorious hope of his coming again "in like manner as ye saw him ascending." Bodily he left this earth, bodily and "in great glory" he is to return. Praise his name!

In "Tarbell's Teachers' Guide" is a good suggestion for review Sunday, viz., that a series of elliptical phrases be written upon a board or chart, that will fix the chief idea or serve to recall the lessons, as follows:

(1) Let her alone . . . (2) For ye have the poor . . . (3) Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached . . . (4) Verily I say unto you, One . . . (5) For the Son of Man goeth . . . (6) This is my blood . . . (7) Take ye . . . (8) My soul is . . . (9) Father, all things . . . (10) Watch and . . . (11) My God, my . . . (12) Why seek ye . . . (13) Ye shall be my . . .

These phrases may be written upon cards or slips of paper and distributed to classes or individuals, the entire sentence to be recited when called for.

THIEVING GEESE SWIM RIVER

And the Stolen Chickens Are Wafted Across Stream on Their Necks, Is the Story.

All summer people coming and going over the river road have noticed four extra large geese a mile below here. These geese belong to the Binn farm, across the river.

Early in the spring the geese crossed the river and mingled with the fowls on the Bagg farm. They would come in the morning and return at night. This continued until recently.

A few weeks ago Bagg observed that ten of his choice hens were missing and attributed the theft to thieves. Last week he lost 18, and as his henhouse was locked, the windows barred and no signs that it had been entered, he believed that a fox was carrying away his poultry. Saturday he put in the day watching his diminishing flock.

Late in the afternoon he heard a commotion near the river bank. Looking there, he saw two geese with heads together and perched upon their necks was one of his hens. The geese started and swam sideways across the river. The two remaining geese entered the water, another hen flew to their necks and they departed.

Bagg entered his rowboat and rowed to the Binn farm. There he learned that 40 strange hens had joined the Binn flock. After explaining the exploit of the geese Bagg was allowed to take his hens home. The geese are now inclosed in a pen. —Brewerton (N. Y.) Dispatch to New York Tribune.

Greatly Benefited.

"Your weight seems to be about the same all the time, Mr. Knaggs."

"About the same. However, it varied a little last year."

"Tell me about it."

"Owing to an affection of the throat, Mrs. Knaggs was unable to speak for two weeks, and I gained seven pounds."

Long Literary Life.

Francois Ferthialt, the latest chevalier of the French Legion of Honor, published his first volume in 1830, when he was seventeen and his latest in 1912. This makes a record hard to parallel. There appear to be only two other instances of a centenarian writer, and neither of these could show a literary life extending over eighty-two years. Michel Chevreul, who died in 1889 at the age of 103, issued his earliest publication at the age of thirty-seven and his latest sixty years afterward. Miss Caroline White, whose death occurred last September in her 101st year, came nearer than this to the record of M Ferthialt. She began writing for the monthly magazines when she was twenty-two and continued her literary labors until within a few months of her death.

Her Gain.

"Is Mrs. Maggs grieving much over the loss of her husband?"

"How can she be when she's got his insurance?"